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# Healers and Helpers, Unifying the People: A Qualitative Study of Lakota Leadership

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## Abstract

Previously, scholars have implied that leadership theory is “universal” enough and can be applied systematically regardless of cultural influences in subcultures. Leadership research has limited its scope of discernment to dominant society, implying that nonmainstream individuals will acquiesce and that cultural differences are inconsequential. Therefore, the intention of this study was to address the disparity between current leadership theories and a subgroup perspective. Specifically, this study explored leadership from a Lakota Sioux perspective. In this qualitative grounded theory study, six major and five minor themes surfaced: Traditional Values and Behaviors, Putting Others First, Lakota Leadership Qualities (Men, Women, and Fallen Leaders), The Red Road, Nation Building (“Real” Natives and Bicultural), and Barriers. These findings reveal that Lakota leadership is not elucidated by current theory. Thus, to effectively illustrate leadership, researchers should broaden contextual aspects to include subcultures.

**Keywords:** cultural differences in leadership, leadership, leadership behavior, subcultures and leadership

Ethnic minorities in the United States remain underrepresented in a number of occupations and higher positions (Yelamathi & Mawasha, 2008). One indication of this oversight pertains to leadership and the understanding of ethnic and cultural differences in leadership. Although there is a widespread disparity in quality leadership practice in mainstream society, the characteristics and understanding of superior leadership are as diverse as the theories themselves (Wren, 1995). In efforts to understand the complexities of this topic, many scholars have approached research from a Western model, believing that leadership conveys a central authority that controls not only the use of rewards and sanctions but also the influence and power over others (Porter, Angle, & Allen, 2003).

In addition, some researchers have argued that some leadership theories, and more specifically leadership behaviors, can be relevant everywhere (Bass, 1996). Stogdill (1948, 1970) even concluded that there were some personal “dispositions associated with leadership such as energy level, cognitive ability, persistence, and sense of responsibility” that are universal (as cited in Bass, 1996, pp. 732–733). Although Bass (1996) admits that the “three parameters of leader–follower relations ... may vary across cultures from very little to a great deal,” he, like others, continues to contextualize research in the

mainstream organizational framework, even in studies done outside of the United States. Other research, including Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) seminal work as well as the GLOBE studies (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006), have unquestionably demonstrated that cultural and ethnic groups do not think and act in an equivalent manner. However, for cultural subgroups (a subordinate group whose members usually share some common differential quality), being clumped into a general, conformist perspective often repudiates what makes them unique in the first place. Thus, in structuring the majority of leadership research in conventional organizations or applying current theory to subgroups such as different cultural groups, researchers remove the possibility of exploring new insights in the field. Thus, it is evident that mainstream leadership theory may be notably lacking (Lumby, 2006).

## Focus of Study

Despite a growing body of leadership research, scholars currently have a limited understanding of subculture’s leadership qualities and preferences. Studies in cross-cultural psychology have noted that many “methodological problems” encountered have led to “spuri-

ous evidence of behavioral differences,” and when similarities are found, they are often taken at face value in spite of biased and existing methodological problems (Best & Thomas, 2004, p. 299). In contrast, differences in behaviors of various cultural groups are interpreted more cautiously and are not considered “true cultural differences” (Best & Thomas, 2004). Often differences are pushed aside with the supposition that cultures can and should assimilate to mainstream practice, including in regard to leadership. Additionally, many people of color are fearful that if they do not conform, repercussions, not only on themselves but also on others, will follow. For instance, leadership studies with people of color have found that “an overwhelming majority has worried deeply that if they failed in their jobs, others of their race/ethnicity would be penalized” (Woods & Conklin, 2007, p. 12).

A similar perception in research regarding leadership practices has ensued. Leadership studies have primarily focused on conventional organizations, and when they have reached outside of this milieu, researchers have imposed theory developed from this environment onto subgroups or women. Alice Eagly’s (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002) work on gender and leadership is one such example. Although Eagly’s results show that women more often are recognized as being more transformational leaders than men (Eagly et al., 2003), they also are not viewed as successfully or as frequently as emerging leaders as their male counterparts (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Bourdieu’s (1973) work on cultural reproduction led the way in demonstrating how schools, through their emphasis on upper-class and middle-class language, reproduce and “legitimize” class structure, thus oppressing lower class and minority students.

Regarding Native Americans, although there has been some leadership research, generally it has been from either a historical or a mainstream perspective. What little research has been conducted has been limited to leadership in a medical context (Nichols, 2004) or has used case study approach to focus on the decision-making process rather than the actual leadership that guided it (Prindeville, 2002). To date, little research has been conducted that has considered contemporary Native leadership from their point of view.

### **Purpose Statement**

Based on limited research and historical observations, we have some idea of what Native American leadership may look like in the present day. Given the volume of literature and research on leadership, the need for understanding subgroups and their leadership qualities outside the mainstream framework is a limitation and should be addressed. To begin to address this inadequacy, the purpose of this critical grounded theory (Hatch, 2002, p. 16), qualitative study was to ex-

plore leadership qualities from the Lakota perspective. Ten enrolled members of the Lakota Sioux were asked to discuss their opinions and observations regarding Lakota leadership, and from their perspectives, confer what they felt constitutes the characteristics of a successful Lakota leader.

### **Literature Review**

Research suggests that using a narrow view of race, diversity, and gender results in an incomplete transformation of organizational culture (Thomas, 1991) and demonstrates a more ethnocentric outlook (Cox, 1993). According to Gatmon et al. (2001), most of the research regarding multicultural supervision and leadership has been theoretical, with little focused on subgroups groups. “People have consistently shielded themselves, segregated themselves, even fortified themselves, against wide differences in modes of perception or expression” (Bennett, 1993, p. 45). Maintaining a research tradition of theory development exclusively from a dominant cultural perspective only sanctions ethnocentric thinking and dominant culture’s biased systems. For indigenous people who have been persecuted for their differences, this can be especially true (V. Deloria, 1970).

One such barrier to leadership research has previously included oral traditions. Until recently, dominant society has negated to sanction a number of customs such as oral accounts common within the Lakota and other Native people as a legitimate means of passing on historical, cultural, and traditional teachings (Ambler, 1995). To deal effectively with understanding how the historical context has affected indigenous culture, leadership and tribal systems, depending solely on literature, have been only as accurate as the third party’s written interpretation (V. Deloria 1970; Reinhardt, 2007). Fleet (2000) wrote, “During the course of the last several centuries, oral tradition has continued in an unbroken chain for many peoples and this sometimes conflicts with written records documented by settlers, missionaries and anthropologists” (p. 4). These orations emphasized the values, history, and culture that each generation felt were vital to implant in the minds of the children.

In addition to understanding cultural dynamics and traditions such as narratives, in order to provide a framework for this study, it was also important to understand the need for a more interculturally sensitive and ethnorelative approach to leadership study. Generally, there have been two predominant paradoxical viewpoints about the cultural integration of diverse populations in the United States. One view is referred to as the “melting pot” and proposes that people of different races and ethnicities should blend together and assimilate into a common national culture. This “melting pot” attitude has been explicitly demonstrated historically in regard to the indigenous people of the United States. The other philosophy is designated as the “multicultural society” and suggests

that those of different groups should retain their cultural patterns and coexist with each other (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000). According to Bennett (1993), this would necessitate that individuals and society move toward a more ethnorelative perspective, which to date leadership researchers have generally disregarded.

### *Native American Leadership*

To date, there is very little research pertaining to the leadership qualities of Native Americans. Available literature can be characterized as case studies of historical figures including Crazy Horse (Marshall, 2009), Sitting Bull (Utley, 1994), Red Cloud (Paul, 1997), and others, or events such as the siege of Wounded Knee (Lyman, 1991) or the Battle of Little Big Horn (Marshall, 2007). Recent studies of Native American leadership observed that many individuals made references to their cultural history and racial/ethnic identities as being extremely important in their leadership perspectives (Prindeville, 2002). For instance, Native Americans discussed at length barriers they overcame. A number of them still spoke their native languages at home, whereas others had been strongly encouraged not to, having been told "it would interfere with their ability to speak English well, potentially harming their opportunities for success in the dominant Anglo culture" (Prindeville, 2002, p. 73). Study contributors have conveyed other obstacles, including stereotypes and discrimination on the part of mainstream society, versus the dichotomous juggling they encountered with their own cultural practices (Portman & Garrett, 2005; Prindeville, 2002).

Another aspect of this dichotomous cultural concurrence that many Native Americans deal with is in regard to spirituality (Garrett, 1994). Many Lakota, like other Native Americans, were forced to attend Indian boarding schools to "civilize them" (Adams, 1995). As such, "Christian education and becoming civilized" were the preferred means by the U.S. government to "advance" Natives and prepare them for "American life" (Coleman, 1993, p. 57). According to Cao (2005), religious institutions have been an influence in the lives of new immigrants and Indigenous people, both as a venue of ethnic reproduction as well as a force for assimilation and change. Thus, today many Indigenous people observe both traditional and Christian practices in their daily lives (Brown, 1953; Pickering, 2000).

Some researchers have also recognized the need to better understand and incorporate Native traditions and practices, especially in working with other Natives. The majority of this type of research has been done in the fields of health care and mental health (Garrett, 1994). For instance, Nichols (2004) addressed the necessity for more Indian nurses to be trained and developed as leaders to better advocate for Native health care practices. Nichols (2004) wrote, "It is important to consider those aspects of Native American culture that may influence

leadership styles" (p. 178). Nichols (2004) concluded that Native American leaders lead differently than non-Native leaders and are apt to be more successful in Native health care than non-Indians.

According to Smith (2002), formal written literature on Native American leadership is almost nonexistent. Nichols (2004, p. 182) argues for "culturally appropriate techniques" for leadership development for those working with Native Americans. The author goes on to say that because Native American leadership is viewed and exercised differently, traditional (Western) methods for identifying, developing, and supporting natural leaders within the Indian community may be inappropriate (Nichols, 2004). Others have called American research, especially regarding psychology and leadership studies, as being "culture bound" and "culture blind" (Chemers, 1995). Chemers (1995) posits that the generalizability of research findings is limited by the fact that the majority of the research is conducted with European or American samples and that it rarely compares cultures, especially those that are non-Caucasian and nonconformist. Chemers (1995) also points out that "this problem becomes more salient when we attempt to export our theories and training programs to cultures which are different from those in which the theories were developed" (p. 94).

Researching leadership from a subgroup perspective can be beneficial in a number of ways. First, comparative studies can show researchers the generalizability of research theories. Second, this type of research can help scholars recognize inherent limitations in the application to other cultures or subgroups. Third, comparative studies can help push researchers, and perhaps in turn society, past an ethnocentric view of leadership. "Because we are just beginning to understand how the role of culture influences leadership and organizational processes, numerous research questions remain unanswered" (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004, p. 5).

This study is unique in that it focuses specifically on the current leadership qualities of the Lakota from their own perspectives. Because participants defined successful leadership for themselves, a more unbiased, nonmainstream perspective was obtained. To date, no studies have been found that focused solely on the leadership characteristics and perspectives from the viewpoint of the Lakota.

## **Method**

### *Research Participants*

Because of the specific nature of this study, a grounded theory, purposeful sampling design was used. For grounded theory, sampling is purposeful and intentional rather than random (Creswell, 2002, 2003, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ultimately, 10 members of the Sicanġu and Oglala Lakota (Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservation) were chosen because they had



a unique perspective and experience regarding Lakota leadership. Of these participants, six were women and four were men and ranged from 31 to 72 years of age. These individuals understood the central phenomenon of the study and were able to construct narratives that were essential for generating theory (Creswell, 2003, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### Data Collection and Analysis

Open-ended interviews lasting between 60 and 150 minutes were conducted until data saturation criteria were met (Creswell, 2003, 2008). In this study, data saturation was reached at nine participants. The 10th participant was interviewed as a means of verifying data saturation. In this study, multiple participants, several sites, and two methods of data collection provided opportunity for triangulation, which is an important way to increase the accuracy and credibility of theory development in qualitative research (Hatch, 2002).

Once the interviews were transcribed, three common methods of code and theme verification were used to obtain validity in the analysis (Creswell, 2003). First, verification was obtained by conducting a literature review. Second, triangulation was used to verify codes and themes within the study (Creswell, 1998). Third, coding methods were verified through the use of a separate peer reviewer who provided an external check of the research process (Creswell, 1998). Additionally, the researcher has spent a prolonged amount of time throughout the past 12 years interacting with the Lakota. During these interactions, a number of observations were made that assisted in checking for misinterpretation regarding the researcher's cultural distortions of Lakota practices.

The data analysis phase of this investigation also followed the systematic procedures for grounded theory data analysis outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). These procedures include the use of open, axial, and selective coding, which impart rigor and accuracy to the data analysis process (Creswell, 2008). Initially, all data passed through two stages of coding analysis. First, all interview transcripts were thoroughly read and coded as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), looking for subcategories following the open coding system of segmenting information. Second, axial coding was used to assemble the data in new ways after open coding (Creswell, 1998). Finally, the researcher developed themes that pulled together all the aspects learned about the Lakota and their leadership perspectives (Creswell, 1998).

## Findings

### Central Phenomenon

Although the central phenomenon of this exploratory study was Lakota leadership, several key findings

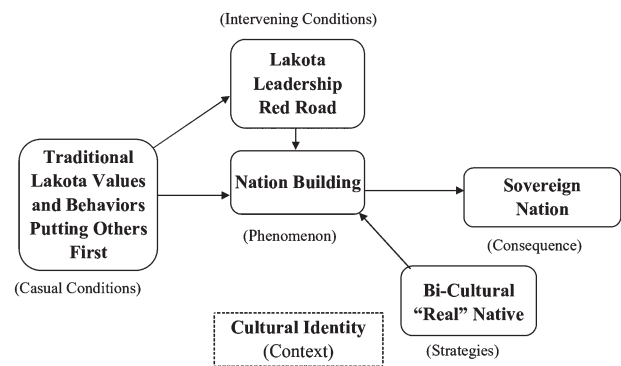


Figure 1. Coding paradigm for core category

helped shape the final conclusions. First, a major thread embedded throughout the interviews was the concept of cultural identity. All the participants discussed at length their identification as a Lakota, and as such, all the answers and conversation concerning any of the other themes and concepts were considered from a Lakota identity perspective. For all the participants, discussion of Lakota leadership without including cultural identity was not viable. This is consistent with other findings from Hofstede (1984) and Triandis (1984), who assert that the "values and beliefs held by members of cultures influence the degree to which the behaviors of individuals, groups, and institutions within cultures are enacted, and the degree to which they are viewed as legitimate, acceptable, and effective" (as cited in House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Initially, there was consideration of making cultural identity its own theme; however, after further reflection the realization was that removing "cultural identity" from the other themes would eliminate the richness and color from the other categories, thus negating the connotation of the participants' comments. Second, as the investigation into Lakota leadership advanced, there was an awareness of several layers of leadership facets, as well as the ultimate purpose of Lakota leadership. For example, all the participants talked about core values that they felt leaders should possess, but the *čewićaša*, the common people, should also possess. Four of the participants also talked about a long-range perspective of leadership, specifically "building a nation" with regard to what the future could hold for the *oyate* (see Figure 1). Thus, although Lakota leadership remained the central phenomenon, its components became multifaceted and multidimensional.

### Themes

The qualitative analysis of the 10 Lakota participants' responses regarding leadership qualities resulted in six major thematic categories: (a) Traditional Values and Behaviors, (b) Putting Others First, (c) Lakota Leader-

**Table 1.** Lakota Leadership Themes and Definitions

Themes	Definitions
Traditional Values and Behaviors	Described as living a life that demonstrates the Lakota virtues of humility, generosity, respect for family and traditions, as well as forgiveness and compassion
Leadership Qualities	Defined as the ability to lead others through understanding and prioritizing the needs of the people by listening to the council of others, being diplomatic, visionary, and holistic in one's actions
Putting Others First	Described as being willing to help others by listening, helping them emotionally, physically, and spiritually, as well as being willing to give away what others need more
Red Road	Defined as a customary understanding of Lakota spirituality and traditions, including honoring ceremonies and Lakota customs
Nation Building	The aspiration and objective of moving the tribe toward becoming a sovereign nation that is self-reliant, in both traditional and contemporary structures
Barriers	Barriers is defined as the obstacles that current leaders face in continuing to develop and progress the tribe into the future. This includes previous governmental policies and practices, the loss of culture, and stereotypes and prejudice faced by the Lakota

ship Qualities, (d) The Red Road, (e) Nation Building, and (f) Barriers. In addition, the theme "Lakota Leadership" was divided into subcategories: (c-1) Women, (c-2) Men, (c-3) Fallen Leaders; and "Nation Building" was subdivided into (e-1) "Real" Natives and (e-2) Bicultural. These categories give insight into the qualities participants believe are important for individual and community leadership (see Figure 1 for coding paradigm; see Table 1 for theme definitions).

**Traditional values and behaviors.** For the majority of the participants, traditional values and behaviors are cultural "norms" that have been passed down for generations. Although Lakota authors have discussed traditional "virtues" such as fortitude, compassion, humility, and generosity (E. C. Deloria, 1988; Marshall, 2001; Mohatt & Eagle Elk, 2000; Pickering, 2000), the participants expanded these original virtues into a way of life that one is persistently pursuing and expecting others to practice. Traditional values and behaviors were historically taught by grandparents. Once the Lakota, like other Indigenous tribes, were sent to boarding schools, a number of these values were not emphasized and thus not as prevalent in the current generations (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc, 2006). One participant described the attrition of traditional values: "From 1880 the United States had outlawed everything. St. Francis Mission and boarding school came here in 1876. By the 1930s, those students had become parents, and they took their kids to school, so parental separation started early." Because of these assimilative efforts, a number of traditional values and behaviors eroded away, but because of the efforts of a resilient few, these traditional values continue to survive.

Another value discussed at length was generosity. For the Lakota, material items are not viewed with as much reverence as in the dominant culture. This philosophy has been documented a number of times by various authors and follows closely with the "pot latch" or *woplia* tradition (give-away) of honoring relatives

and celebrating achievements by giving gifts or needed items (E. C. Deloria, 1944/1998; Marshall, 2001; Mohatt & Eagle Elk, 2000; Pickering, 2000; Young Bear & Theisz, 1994). As one participant declared, "Nothing is too good to give away." "We give away most everything, we give some relatives a place to stay, and we give away blankets, food, clothes and shoes. It's helped me really live with the philosophy that nothing's permanent, it's just here to enjoy."

**Putting others first.** The second major theme, Putting Others First, reiterates the Lakota as a traditionally collectivist society (E. C. Deloria, 1944/1998; E. C. Deloria, 1988; Eastman, 1991; Young Bear & Theisz, 1994). Because of this societal philosophy, there remains a strong attachment to tribal and *tios̄paye* (extended family) affiliation and identity. Language, customs, traditions, and ceremony all reflect the Lakota's belief that placing others before oneself is essential. As one participant described, "People are sacred, so we are always told, pray for the people, help the people, be good to the people, because that's what is going to come back to you."

Historically, the Lakota worked collectively to take care of the needs of the *oyate* or the people (E. C. Deloria, 1944/1998; E. C. Deloria, 1988; Eastman, 1991).

With our people there was always the focus on taking care of one another. We have families, extended families and then some. The children never went hungry; they were never unsupervised, because no matter what, everybody was taken care of.

The philosophy of being related to, and responsible for those outside one's immediate family, extends not just to the larger family units, or *tios̄paye*, but to the earth and its creatures as well (Garrett, 1994). Not only are individuals encouraged to consider others needs before their own in a general sense, this philosophy runs so deeply throughout Lakota culture that prayers and

ceremony are always concluded with the statement “*miŭakuye oyas’iŭ*” or “we are all related.” One participant put forward that

in the Lakota way of prayer, everything you do for the people; you do it with your heart, *cantogna*, because when you do it from your heart you are genuine. Then you will do it in an honest manner with respect.

Not only was putting others first observed at a community level, but it was discussed at the individual level as well. “They say the worst thing you can do is to waste somebody’s time because you are not prepared. In turn, the greatest gift you can give someone is time from your life.” Because of this collectivist mindset there is also a conviction that one’s needs will be taken care of, whether by the person who was originally helped or by someone else (E. C. Deloria, 1988; Marshall, 2001; Mohatt & Eagle Elk, 2000).

**Lakota leadership qualities.** The next major theme, *Lakota Leadership Qualities*, has a long historical place within the tribal culture (E. C. Deloria, 1988; Eastman, 1918/1991; Mails, 1979; Mohatt & Eagle Elk, 2000; Young Bear & Theisz, 1994). As such, one participant described the traditional manner in which leaders and chiefs were chosen:

A long time ago when the *tiošpāye* (extended family) was looking for a leader they would keep an eye on various individuals for a long time. If this person took care of their family, and lived a good life, then the people would gather and have a ceremony, and ask him to be their leader. They would make him a chief, a *naca’*. The whole clan would choose the chief, and choose their leaders.

Although there are more modern examples of choosing a leader or leaders, such as in tribal government, many Lakota still practice the traditional manner of naming *naca’*, or a chief. Leadership is also observed on smaller, more individual levels. For instance, elders are often respected and followed. One participant talked about an elder who had taught him how to prepare for ceremony, and described his *lekci* (uncle) as someone who “wouldn’t hold back on whatever he knew. He just would put it out there for whoever wanted to, would learn.”

Whether honored chief, respected elder, or elected official, the participants detailed a long list of attributes they felt leaders needed to be successful and respected by the community. The majority of the participants talked about the need for leaders to take care of their families. Given that there are a large number of single-parent homes on the reservation, and the collectivist perspective the Lakota hold, this finding was not surprising (Pickering, 2000).

An additional aspect of leadership that several of the participants discussed at length was the notion of leaders soliciting input from others in their decision-making processes. To gain the trust of their followers and develop strong relationships, successful Lakota leaders were often viewed as consulting with others prior to making major decisions. One participant described a difficult decision a tribal leader had made: “He had to make a decision to let some individuals go because it was interfering with ceremony. So in the sweat lodge he asked all of us what we thought. We were with him when he made the decision.” Thus, contribution from others was not uncommon regarding decisions, especially those that would affect the tribe as a whole (E. C. Deloria, 1944/1998; Marshall, 2001; Utley, 1994). Although today the practice is to consult more with close advisors, the majority of the participants spoke of the need for current leaders to continue working at involving others in decision making. For instance, several participants talked about the need for including a woman’s perspective because “they think differently, they make you think about a different perspective that I hadn’t considered.”

An additional dynamic for leaders is their ability to skillfully deal with others in the community. Not only did the participants feel that it was important for leaders to consult with others, but it also was important for leaders to handle difficult situations in such a manner as not to disrespect anyone involved. Many of the participants felt that the manner in which individuals talked to others was crucial to their reverence and success as a leader. This diplomacy for several of the participants was a key aspect in working with others and getting people to listen. This peacekeeping is very similar to the persuasive manner in which Native authors describe historical leaders. A number of Lakota chiefs have been portrayed as great orators, having had the capability to influence and sway others through their use of patience, persistence, and logical arguments. Chiefs such as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, and others were alleged to have sat in council for days, listening to multiple perspectives before making decisions (Marshall, 2007, 2009; Paul, 1997; Utley, 1994).

A different premise that also emerged was the idea of leaders as visionary and holistic thinkers. Several of the participants mentioned the ability of good leaders to think with foresight in broader, more global perspectives. For instance, one discussed the tribal constitution where members deliberately wrote in a clause calling for any decisions that are made as a tribe “has to think seven generations ahead.” One participant talked about Chief Red Cloud as an example and his decision to move the people to the reservation:

A lot of people have said that Red Cloud sold out to the government when he surrendered his people. But I believe that is not really true. I believe that he has given us life. Maybe the Sioux people would have been wiped out had



he not had the wisdom to save the people by surrendering when he did. And he was able to hold the people together. And today, because of that wisdom, we are still a strong nation.

Many of the participants also talked about the ability of leaders to see the strengths and talents in others and work toward developing those strengths. According to the participants, to understand what others' strengths are requires insight, patience, and a nurturing attitude. It also entails a teaching mentality for which the Lakota are known (E. C. Deloria, 1988; Marshall, 2001).

The participants also described the traditional behaviors and attitudes that they felt all Lakota should exhibit, not just their leaders. Many of these values were applied to both men and women leaders, but there also were some characteristics that were gender specific. One of the historical gender implications for the Lakota was the elimination of many of the men's roles as warriors when Indigenous people were placed on reservations. Since then Lakota men have struggled to find ways to empower themselves and maintain their roles as "modern" warriors (Pickering, 2000; Standing Bear, 1993; Young Bear & Theisz, 1994). One of the contributors said it this way,

Men are not being empowered enough to step up and take care of their families. In the past they were warriors, they took care of the family. They took care of the tribe as a nation. They counted *coo* (war accolades) and they did a number of things that were honorable, that facilitated their masculinity. But today, there really isn't anything for them, and I think the stagnancy of that results in them using and abusing.

Several of the participants talked about the role of men as leaders in the Lakota society and what is needed for them to be successful. "In order for men to be empowered and viewed as leaders, we need to honor them. Give them back their identity." Another felt that men have taken on a more conformist attitude toward leadership and that they need to get back to more traditional values and ways. Several participants believe that men have become more assimilated than women, and that because of the influence of White culture, men have allowed "pride to take over humility."

Women, like men, are in a paradoxical situation on the reservation. Single-parent homes are common on the reservation, and because of this situation women are forced into taking care of the family's needs. Because of these and other societal struggles, women have been forced to take on new roles and responsibilities as family and community leaders. Although some of the male participants were very honoring of the women and their contributions as leaders, there were some that felt the "current gender equality on the reservation is a product of Euro-American influences" (Pickering, 2000, p. 79).

As one participant reiterated,

There is not a standard of you have to do a, b, c, to be recognized as a leader. There are a lot of natural leaders that eventually get recognized, but men are far more revered than the women are.

Several of the female participants felt that women are not readily seen as leaders, even though they have served on the tribal council, as tribal presidents, and have contributed to the community in terms of creating organizations that serve reservation needs. Other contributors talked about the seemingly contradictory message that women receive. "If a woman is strong like a man, she is considered too manly; men think she is too overpowering. Women need to get their things done without seeming so overbearing."

Given the nature of societal problems on and off of the reservation, discussion of leaders who have had personal challenges became pertinent to the study. What participants shared regarding leaders who had struggled personally for some reason were revealing. Lakota contributors talked extensively about their expectations of those who had encountered trouble, and not only their willingness to forgive and welcome them back into the fold but also their desire to help the "fallen leader" (Garrett, 1994). The first expectation that many shared was the desire to see the individuals be honest and, if appropriate, apologize for what had transpired. "It all depends on what they've done, and how drastic it is, but we are a forgiving people." All the participants talked about the demonstration of humility when leaders could not handle something on their own, and the respect and willingness to help that many of them had for their leaders. "I would forgive him of his humanness and offer to help him get back on the Red Road. Try and help him get his bearing again, and encourage him to get back to being the way he was before."

*The Red Road.* To conduct an exploratory study on the Lakota and not have any discussion on spirituality would be incomplete (Garrett, 1994). Although there are Lakota who do not regularly practice traditional Lakota spirituality, even the practicing Christians have some connection with Lakota traditions (Petrillo, 2007; Pickering, 2000). Lakota spirituality is viewed as more than a religious practice; it is described as a way of life (E. C. Deloria, 1944/1998; Fire Lane Deer & Erdoes, 1992; Garrett, 1994; Marshall, 2001, 2009; Petrillo, 2007). This spiritual practice is a philosophy where the people are holistically connected to and honor all things.

During the interviews, all 10 of the participants discussed the need for Lakota leaders to have some spiritual foundation. The majority felt having at least a grasp of traditional spiritual practices was needed. This corresponds with the notion of cultural identity for the Lakota, as spirituality and cultural practices are so deeply entwined for many that the thought of having one without the other is unfathomable (Fire Lane Deer & Erdoes,



1992; Garrett, 1994). As one participant said, "I think that having an understanding of the Lakota way of life is important. Not necessarily that you have to practice the Lakota spirituality, but having some sort of spirituality is really, really key." Another participant felt that having a spiritual base helped people be well-rounded. "Having some sort of spiritual base humbles you to stay away from being out for just yourself."

Eight of the participants also talked about the need for the tribe to return to its spiritual traditions to heal and move forward as a nation.

We believe that we are all related, not just the two-legged, but the four-legged, the winged, the plants, the animals, *uŋčī maŋka*, the earth, and everything in the universe. We believe holistically that we are all related, we all belong here, we all have a purpose here, even the animals.

There is the understanding by those that follow Lakota spirituality that it also encompasses all of the traditional values. "When you carry a *cannupa* (sacred pipe) you need to be there for all of the people. You can't be biased in who you help and who you can't help."

Several participants also spoke of the need for leaders to understand the path of spirituality, but they also talked about the difficulty in living a good spiritual life. "Whoever's on the Red Road, they fall off, and everyone falls off the Red Road at times. Everyone tries to get back on the Red Road, but some don't succeed and some do." One person described the Red Road as "not just a set of values, or set of religious practices and dogma, but a way of life, a philosophy, and an ever evolving conscious choice of relationships with self and *Wakáŋ Tánka*, the 'Creator.'" Thus, for the Lakota, having an understanding of ceremonial practices, Lakota spirituality, and the philosophy of the Red Road are imperative concepts for Lakota leaders.

**Nation building.** In the last theme, the participants discussed the ultimate goal of Lakota leadership is for the *oyate*, or the people, to become a sovereign nation—an independent, self-functioning entity. That is not to say the Lakota Tribe desires to be separate from the United States. On the contrary, the Lakota involved in this study are not only proud of being Lakota, they are also proud of being Americans. Instead, the participants recognize the dependence the people have on governmental resources and their desire is to decrease this reliance. "They say we are a sovereign nation, but we are not. In order to be sovereign, we need to govern and support ourselves economically." Thus, for the participants, there is also a strong desire to transcend the societal problems that have plagued them for several generations.

Many of the participants felt it was their responsibility to continue the work chiefs such as Iron Shell, Red Cloud, Hollow Horn Bear, and Spotted Tail had done

when they signed the original treaties. This work necessitates the tribe continuing to thrive, as well as to revitalizing cultural pride through language, customs, and practices. Although the focus of the participants' efforts varied from individual to individual, the overarching goal remained the same, tribal growth.

Many of the participants feel that the best way to build a nation is through Lakota, not Euro-American leadership. Therefore, maintaining the Lakota "way of life" as a vehicle to guide the process of nation building is imperative. "We always have to remember where we come from because if we forget, then we lose our identity. Then we are no longer a nation." Many of the participants also discussed the precariousness of this endeavor, not only because of intertribal dynamics but also the influences of outside entities such as state and federal governments.

## Theoretical Leadership and Lakota Leadership

In comparing the findings from this study with transformational, full-range, and servant leadership, limited resemblance was found. Given the qualitative nature and purpose of this study, direct associations with leadership theories cannot be made, as questions were not expressly made to mirror other leadership theories. However, several of this study's findings somewhat implied the disposition of subitems from Greenleaf's (1970, 1977, 1996) servant leader characteristics. Greenleaf's (1970) original 10 characteristics of Servant leadership include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, and community building. An 11th characteristic, calling, was operationalized because of the intrinsic implication from Greenleaf's work (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). From these characteristics the theme Leadership Qualities and the Greenleaf's (1970) characteristics of Calling, Healing, Awareness, and Growth were thought to be associated. The theme Putting Others First was found to be consistent with Listening and Empathy. Nation Building as a theme was found to have similar characteristics of the servant leadership characteristics of Building Community and Foresight. Although on the surface there seems to be some general analogous characteristics between Greenleaf's (1970, 1977, 1996) and Spears's (1995) conceptualization of servant leadership, further research is needed to fully understand the relationship between these two constructs (see Table 2).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Although scholars such as Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and House et al. (2004) have looked at different cultures internationally, leadership theory has neglected looking at subcultures as a potential influence on vari-

**Table 2.** Lakota and Servant Leadership Compared

Lakota	Servant Leadership		Lakota Themes Applied to
Leadership Themes	Characteristics and Descriptions (Greenleaf, 1977)		Servant Leadership
Traditional Values/ Behaviors	Calling	Natural desire to serve others	Leadership qualities
Leadership Qualities	Listening	Receptive to others' viewpoints	Putting others first
The Red Road	Empathy	Understand others' circumstances	Putting others first
Putting Others First	Healing	Help facilitate others' healing process	Leadership qualities
Nation Building	Awareness	Understand environment around them	Leadership qualities
Barriers			Barriers
	Persuasion	Are able to convince others to their viewpoints	Not observed (implied in one interview)
	Conceptualization	Foster and environment of creativity and problem solving	Not observed in study
	Foresight	Anticipate the future and its consequences	Nation building (implied)
	Stewardship	Prepare organization to make a positive difference in the world	Not observed in study (implied)
	Growth	Helping others grow and develop	Leadership qualities
	Building community	Strong sense of community/community building	Nation building

ability. "The world is full of confrontations between people, groups, and nations who think, feel and act differently" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 2). Given that organizations and communities are becoming more diverse, the need to challenge underlying homogeneity assumptions becomes more imperative for organizational and societal growth. To further leadership knowledge, scholars could consider including subcultures within their leadership studies to explore variances currently found within leadership theory. Although culture is "always a collective phenomenon" (House et al., 2004), theorists have assumed that mainstream perspectives have trumped subculture such that the underlying assumption is that subculture dynamics will not affect leadership phenomenon (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This study formulates the implication that subcultures may account for more of the variance than originally believed. Thus, future research could not only replicate this study with other Lakota and Native American tribes but is also needed with other subcultures and groups to fully explore the idiosyncrasies of leadership from all perspectives.

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